Editor's Introduction

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The year 2013 was the second centenary of the birth of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55), perhaps the most famous philosopher to come from Denmark. To mark this event, a small group of theologians and philosophers gathered in Leuven on 7 March 2013 for a day of intense reflections on his masterwork, *Fear and Trembling.* Within this work, Kierkegaard, through the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio, explored the *Akedah* story within the book of Genesis which recounts Abraham's binding of his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. It is probably the most widely read book of Kierkegaard and one that is regularly assigned within general philosophy and theology classes alike.[1]

The present volume brings together seven essays that were presented as drafts and extensively discussed during the meeting in Leuven in March 2013. In addition to marking the bi-centennial of Kierkegaard's life, the group's aim was to read *Fear and Trembling* as a classic, that is: as a work that transcends its immediate context and audience, and that is able to speak meaningfully to people in different places and at different times. Additionally, a classic can be read fruitfully from within a diversity of theoretical frameworks and approaches, which this group sought to represent. Those contributing a paper were therefore invited to read *Fear and Trembling* from within their own specific theoretical framework and field of expertise, linking the text with authors and topics they normally work on.

[1] Cf. C. Stephan Evans in his introduction to Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, ed. C. Stephan Evans and Sylvia Walsh, trans. Sylvia Walsh, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vi–xxx (at vi).

In the first contribution, *Mattias Martinson* (Uppsala University, Sweden) takes issue with a group of commentators that detect a very distinct Christian message in *Fear and Trembling*. Opting for what he calls "an experimental and agnostic approach to the work" and leaving aside "the question of what Kierkegaard ultimately meant with his book", Martinson defends the view that "*Fear and Trembling* represents theology at a standstill", "a theology that cannot be embraced" (p. 8), but that [p. 2] precisely as such challenges philosophy. In his contribution, Martinson pays special attention to the meaning of the epigraph at the beginning of the work, deals with Hegel's secret presence within *Fear and Trembling*, and concludes by putting the work in relation with Theodor W. Adorno, whose philosophy, Martinson explains, was an attempt to steer a middle course between Hegel and Kierkegaard.

Hegel is the focus of the second contribution. In it, *Thomas Lynch* (University of Chichester, UK) analyses Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel (as phrased in *Fear and Trembling* by Kierkegaard's pseudonym de Silentio) and explores the consequences of this criticism for the contemporary, so-called "non-metaphysical" approach to Hegel and his philosophy of religion (an approach that is espoused by scholars such as Klaus Hartmann, Robert Pippin, and Terry Pinkard). Lynch defends that Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* in fact anticipated the limits of the "non-metaphysical" reading of Hegel and he adds that it allows us "to preserve Hegel's transformation of theology while expanding religion's function in society" (p. 31). Yet, at the same time, reading *Fear and Trembling* side by side with the "non-metaphysical" reading of Hegel allows us, Lynch shows, to draw out the social dimension of Kierkegaard's famous book.

The third contribution, written by *Justin Sands* (North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa), offers a reading of *Fear and Trembling* in the context of a reflection on the relationship between faith and reason. Sands first develops a critique of reason in line with the late Martin Heidegger, before turning to a critique of faith, for which he takes his lead from

Fear and Trembling, and before entering in dialogue with the work of Merold Westphal. In this way, Sands wishes to bring to the fore an understanding of faith and reason that implies that these are two equal forms of thinking that can work together in the life of the believing soul". Sands' ultimate aim is to scrutinize the nature of thinking itself and to unearth the presuppositions that hinder both reason and faith to think.

In the fourth contribution, *Paul Hedges* (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore) reads *Fear and Trembling* as offering an argument that "can be read as an explicit attempt to show why we should reject [Abraham as an exemplar]" (p. 71). He does this by discussing *Fear and Trembling* in the context of the debate on the so-called "ethics of belief", a debate to which mainly figures such as William James and William Kingdom Clifford contributed, and that was more recently continued by Susan Haack. Furthermore, Hedges [p. 3] pays attention to three elements that cannot but be taken into account when we read *Fear and Trembling* in today's situation: religious diversity, historical criticism of the biblical texts, and critical questions about authorial intent and the place of *Fear and Trembling* in the entirety of Kierkegaard's corpus.

The fifth contribution is a reflection on the *Akedah* by *Susanne Wigorts Yngvesson* (Stockholm School of Theology, Sweden) for which she is reading Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* side by side with "Friend, in the desolate time", a poem by Swedish poet Erik Johan Stagnelius. As explained by Wigorts Yngvesson, this poem does not deal with the *Akedah* explicitly, but it revealed itself to her as in fact offering a commentary on Abraham's struggle with God. In her contribution, Wigorts Yngvesson ponders on the role of "seeing" in the story of the *Akedah*, wonders about who is Isaac and what is his relationship to his father Abraham, dwells upon the figure and role of the angel in the narrative, and concludes by offering a queer-theological reading of the text.

In my own contribution, I reflect on the future prospects of "Abrahamic faith", an

expression I use to describe the understanding of faith that is present in *Fear and Trembling*. In my text, I explore this type of faith with the help of *The Hostage*, a drama written by French Catholic playwright and poet Paul Claudel, engaging and criticising the comments that Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek and Alenka Zupančič have formulated on the play. In particular, I proceed by means of a comparison between Sygne de Coûfontaine, the heroine of *The Hostage*, and Abraham in order to foreground the predicament of faith in an age of "the eclipse of providence". In the final section of my text, I engage the Book of Job, indicating that the problem of the eclipse of providence was already present in the Bible itself and contrasting the interpretation of the Book of Job by two contemporary philosophers, Paul Ricoeur and Žižek, as pointing to two different ways to respond to the eclipse of providence.

Finally, *Mark A. Godin* (University of Chester, UK), reflects on his own struggle with Kierkegaard as "a case study for reflecting on the nature of the reciprocity between theology and education" (p. 154) and as an occasion for highlighting "the way that a theologian's own story, identity, and imagination wind through their work" (p. 153-154) and that of their students. This reflection leads Godin to ask that theologians should become much more aware of the situated-ness of their theologies, how what they say and what they write is influenced by the teachers they happened to have and the books they were assigned to [p. 4] read. According to Godin, this is precisely a lesson to be learned from Kierkegaard: "that a plurality of particularities exist, waiting to be engaged by our imaginations" and that it is "our provisionality [that allows] us to embrace our contingencies and turn to others so that we might ask them about theirs" (p. 170).

Taken together, the seven essays collected here testify to the status of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* as a classical text in philosophy and theology. *Fear and Trembling* is indeed a text that is able to continue to challenge and question new generations of theologians and philosophers as time passes by, a text that is able to continue to serve as both a source of

inspiration and a stumbling block in a variety of contexts, a text that is able to continue to shed light on new developments in thought and is shed light on by these new developments. Evidently, the present volume does not claim to offer an all-embracing interpretation of *Fear and Trembling*. Any such claim would in fact contradict the fundamental starting point of the collection, namely that *Fear and Trembling* is a classic that is new at each moment and whose meaning cannot be exhausted. Rather, the present collection is humble in its pretensions. It gathers seven particular voices on *Fear and Trembling*, the voices of seven individuals who have approached the text from within their own research interests and intellectual background. Yet, at the same time, I hope that by bringing these seven voices together in the present book, something of a panoramic view on *Fear and Trembling* may open up to you as a reader, a view that may inspire you to either turn or return to Kierkegaard's most famous book, and let yourself, for the first time or once more, be challenged, disturbed, and maybe even repelled by this text that reflects on a father that is, or at least seems, willing to sacrifice his only son because God ordered him to do so.

Let me conclude with a remark on editions and translations. *Fear and Trembling* was published initially in Danish in 1843 and was translated in English five times since. Four different translations were used by the contributors to this volume: (1) the 1941 translation by Walter Lowrie (used by Wigorts Yngvesson), (2) the 1983 translation by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong that appeared in the *Kierkegaard's Writings* series (used by Lynch and Sands), (3) the 1985 translation by Alastair Hannay (used by Martinson, Hedges, and Godin), and (4) the 2006 new translation by Sylvia Walsh that appeared in the *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* series (by myself). I decided that it would be unwise to force any particular translation on the contributors, as the existence of different translations that are used and circulate next to each other is [p. 5] part of what characterises a classic work that was originally published in a foreign language. Moreover, each of these four translations is currently still in

print and, as far as I can judge, each of them is widely accessible to both the academic and the general public so that pursuing a particular reference should not pose insurmountable problems.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to everybody who made the present volume possible. A collection of essays like this book is always the result of a collective effort. I therefore wish to thank wholeheartedly first of all the contributors to the volume – Mattias, Thomas, Justin, Paul, Susanne, and Mark – for making the paper they contributed to the meeting of 7 March 2013 available for publication in this volume. I also wish to thank Tina Beattie (University of Roehampton), Patrick Eldridge (Catholic University of Leuven), Jennifer Geddes (University of Virginia), Stephen Hall (Catholic University of Leuven), Jayne Svenungsson (Stockholm School of Theology), and Alana M. Vincent (University of Chester), for their contribution to the conversation on *Fear and Trembling* we had together back in 2013. Their feedback and input have greatly contributed to the cordial spirit of reflection and inquiry that characterised our gathering in Leuven in March 2013 and although they were, unfortunately, not able to prepare a paper for the meeting, or did not have time due to other obligations to turn their paper into a chapter for the book, I am convinced that some of the insights they shared have influenced the revised versions of the papers that are published here. Moreover, I also wish to thank Leo Kenis and Peeters Publishers for their willingness and support to publish this volume in their *Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia* book series, and Rita Corstjens for her editorial work on the manuscript and printing proofs. I am also grateful to Kid Kumlin for her permission to use her painting on the cover of this book. Finally, I wish to add that I was able to host the gathering of 7 March 2013 in Leuven thanks to the generous bench fee that was provided to me as a post-doctoral fellow by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO Vlaanderen).